



December 21, 2018
Press release #1758

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GUTHRIE THEATER PRESENTS LAUREN YEE'S *THE GREAT LEAP*

**BASKETBALL, FAMILY AND TIANANMEN SQUARE INTERSECT
IN THIS WITTY AND FAST-PACED COMEDIC DRAMA**

“A beautiful play with vibrant characters and rich history crackling with fresh dialog, but then that's what we've come to expect from Lauren Yee.” (Broadway World, Seattle)

(*Minneapolis/St. Paul*) — The Guthrie Theater (Joseph Haj, artistic director) today announced casting for ***The Great Leap***, a sharp-witted new drama by **Lauren Yee**, directed by **Desdemona Chiang**. Yee and Chiang have collaborated for more than a decade, and both are making their Guthrie debuts.

The Great Leap will run January 12 – February 10, 2019, on the McGuire Proscenium Stage. Single tickets start at \$15 for preview performances (January 12–17), and regular tickets range from \$29 to \$78. Tickets are on sale now through the Box Office at 612.377.2224, 1.877.44.STAGE (toll-free) or online at guthrietheater.org. Post-play

discussions and access services (ASL-interpreted, audio-described and open-captioned performances) are available on select dates and by request.

When an American basketball team travels to Beijing for an exhibition game in 1989, the drama goes deeper than the strain between countries. For two men with a past and one teen with a future, the game is a chance to claim personal victories on and off the court. Tensions rise right up to the final buzzer as a pivotal moment in history collides with the action in the arena. Driven by rapid-fire dialogue, this perceptive new play explores the cultural and political risks of raising your voice and standing your ground.

The play's title refers to both the athletic prowess of basketball and the Communist Party of China's Great Leap Forward campaign in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Yee sees basketball as an apt metaphor for politics and diplomacy. According to her stage directions in the script, "This is a play about basketball, but it is also a basketball play. The game is reflected not just in the subject matter but the rhythm, structure, language and how the characters move through space."

Yee is currently one of the most produced playwrights in the country, and her plays often have a familial tie to her personal experience. *The Great Leap* is inspired by her father, Larry Yee, and his brief but influential stint as a basketball player in his youth. "The play is about my father, but I wrote it for my younger brothers," shares Yee. "In *The Great Leap*, Manford is a Chinese-American kid who keeps bumping up against people who don't believe in him or see limitations when they look at him. That's not what I want for my brothers. My wish is that they move through the world unencumbered and be whatever they want to be."

The Great Leap was originally commissioned by the Denver Center for the Performing Arts. Chiang, her longtime friend and collaborator, encouraged Yee to have early readings of the play in Chiang's living room. Chiang shares, "Around my table [at these readings], Lauren figured out what was worth pursuing and maneuvered all those bits and pieces into an incredible play about daring to be seen and speak out, the historical tensions between East and West and the American sport of basketball." Chiang continues, "I love how we infuse so much of our dreams and desires into competitive sports, even at a friendship or amateur level. In *The Great Leap*, the smallest things become the greatest indicators. It's not just a game."

"*The Great Leap* traverses a lot of historic, emotional and geographic territory," Artistic Director Joseph Haj recently shared at the first rehearsal. "I can think of no one better to balance these elements and create this fearless and tender world onstage than Desdemona Chiang."

The cast of *The Great Leap* features **Leah Anderson** (Guthrie: *A Christmas Carol, West Side Story*) as Connie, **Lawrence Kao** (Guthrie: debut) as Manford, **Kurt Kwan** (Guthrie: *Othello, the Moor of Venice*) as Wen Chang and **Lee Sellars** (Guthrie: *Tales from Hollywood*) as Saul.

The creative team for *The Great Leap* includes **Desdemona Chiang** (director), **Sara Ryung Clement** (scenic designer), **Helen Huang** (costume designer), **Paul P. Whitaker** (lighting designer), **Sarah Pickett** (sound designer), **Tom Mays** (projection designer), **Keely Wolter** (voice and dialect coach), **Jo Holcomb** (dramaturg), **Jason Clusman** (stage manager), **Tierra K. Anderson** (assistant stage manager) and **Sun Mee Chomet** (assistant director).

Lauren Yee (playwright) was born and raised in San Francisco, and she currently lives in New York City. She received her B.A. from Yale University and her M.F.A. in playwriting from University of California, San Diego, where she studied under Naomi Iizuka.

The Great Leap has been produced at Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Seattle Repertory Theatre and Atlantic Theater Company, with future productions coming to Arts Club Theatre Company and InterAct Theatre. Yee's *Cambodian Rock Band*, with music by Dengue Fever, premiered at South Coast Repertory and is currently running at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, followed by La Jolla Playhouse and Victory Gardens Theater. Also upcoming is Yee's play *The Song of Summer* at Trinity Repertory Company.

Her honors include the Horton Foote Prize, Kesselring Prize, Francesca Primus Prize, a Hodder Fellowship at Princeton and the top two plays on the 2017 Kilroys List. She is a New Dramatists member, Ma-Yi Writers Lab member and an alumni playwright at The Playwrights Realm. She has written for "Mixtape" (Netflix). Current commissions include Geffen Playhouse, La Jolla Playhouse, Lincoln Center Theater/LCT3, Portland Center Stage, Second Stage Theater, South Coast Repertory and Trinity Repertory Company. Learn more at www.laurenyee.com.

Desdemona Chiang (director) is a stage director based in Seattle and the San Francisco Bay Area. She is the co-founder and co-artistic director of Azeotrope in Seattle.

Her directing credits include Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Baltimore Center Stage, Pittsburgh Public Theater, California Shakespeare Theater, Seattle Repertory Theatre, PlayMakers Repertory Company, Long Wharf Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, A Contemporary Theatre, American Shakespeare Center, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Heritage Theatre Festival, Book-It Repertory Theatre, Aurora Theatre Company, Seattle Public Theater, Shotgun Players, Crowded Fire Theater, Azeotrope, Impact Theatre, Playwrights Foundation, Golden Thread Productions, Washington Ensemble Theatre, One-Minute Play Festival, Ohio Northern University, University of Washington and Cornish College of the Arts, among others.

Chiang's awards and affiliations include the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Theatre, SDCF Sir John Gielgud Directing Fellowship, Drama League Directing Fellowship, TCG Young Leader of Color, Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab and Directors Lab West and Gregory Award for Outstanding Direction. Chiang received her B.A. from University of California, Berkeley, and her M.F.A. in directing from University of Washington School of Drama.

THE GUTHRIE THEATER (Joseph Haj, artistic director) was founded by Sir Tyrone Guthrie in 1963 and is an American center for theater performance, production, education and professional training, dedicated to producing the great works of dramatic literature and cultivating the next generation of theater artists. Under Haj's leadership, the Guthrie is guided by four core values: Artistic Excellence; Community; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; and Fiscal Responsibility. The Guthrie produces a mix of classic and contemporary plays on three stages and continues to set a national standard for excellence in theatrical production and performance, serving nearly 400,000 patrons annually. In 2006, the Guthrie opened a new home, designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Jean Nouvel, located on the banks of the Mississippi River in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Open to the public year-round, it houses three state-of-the-art stages, production facilities, classrooms, full-service restaurants and dramatic public lobbies. guthrietheater.org

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